



Reinstate the Twelve Day Rule

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European Tour Operators are calling on European law makers in Brussels to repeal laws that regulate the amount of rest professional coach drivers are forced to take. The laws, introduced last April, have proved detrimental to coach drivers' livelihood, not beneficial to road safety and damaging to the European coach touring industry,.

In a survey of over 20 leading European inbound tour operators, who bring approximately two million tourists a year to Europe, 86% said that new drivers' hours legislation, which came into force in 2007, has hindered their business; none felt it had helped.

Tom Jenkins, Executive Director, European Tour Operators Association, explained that last year's legislative changes had tried to solve a problem that did not exist. *"The assumption was that increasing the amount of rest drivers were forced to take would lead to greater road safety. But were already an extremely safe mode of travel: altering the pattern of drivers rest has made it no safer. The legislation has made a perfectly safe mode of transport less attractive. This affects driver, employer and consumer alike."*

Among other things the new legislation imposed a compulsory 24 hour rest every six days. This removed a degree of flexibility known as the Twelve Day Rule, whereby drivers could take their rest at the beginning of one week and at the end of the following week, thus giving them up to twelve consecutive days on the road.

Abolition of the Twelve Day Rule has proved to be highly damaging. It has made the operation of tourism unacceptably complicated and more expensive for all parties involved. Tour companies have had to re-plan popular itineraries, while coach operators have had to bring in relief drivers. Experienced drivers see their profession become less attractive for they are forced to take rest time away from home more often.

More worryingly, the new legislation has rendered less safe transport options more attractive to tour organisers. Many Chinese groups have been forced to move away from hiring one large coach, instead hiring several minibuses, which are exempt from the new legislation. The flight from a safe, regulated form of transport to minibuses has adverse effects on quality, safety and comfort.

Tom Jenkins, Executive Director, European Tour Operators Association, said: *"All organisations make mistakes: the real test is how promptly they rectify their mistakes. This legislation is a huge mistake. In early April, the Council of Ministers will have the opportunity to undo the damage by reinstating the Twelve Day Rule. The inbound tourism industry is waiting with bated breath because failure to act will further exacerbate Europe's declining share of world tourism."*

Other findings of ETOA's survey of leading inbound tour operators revealed emphatic opposition to the new drivers' hours provisions, as follows:

- 86% said a reinstatement of the 12-day rule would increase profitability; 0% thought otherwise.
- Nearly 90% affirm that as a result of the new rule has required them to re-plan many of their best-selling or most profitable itineraries.
- Only 18% think the new rule will improve safety.
- 68% agree that the new rule has required them to accept new tour drivers who are considerably less knowledgeable.
- Nearly 70% say that the working relationship between tour managers and drivers has worsened
- 55% have considered reducing the range and choice of itineraries to customers as a result of the ruling.
- None of the tour operators' relationships with coach operator suppliers have improved; indeed, 41% say relations have worsened.

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About ETOA

Since its foundation in 1989, ETOA has grown exponentially to include over 350 member organisations, of which 102 are Tour Operators. Collectively, ETOA represents over €6 billion spending on accommodation and travel services annually.

ETOA provides representation at the European government level for companies involved in bringing tourists to Europe. The Association promotes greater awareness of the benefits provided by the group travel industry in Europe - particularly increased income and employment. ETOA also influences European tourism policy and legislation.

Areas of specific activity include:

- Promoting Europe as a tourism destination
- Establishing codes of conduct and guidelines for its members
- Establishing commercial opportunities between buyers and sellers
- Working with other travel & tourism associations to raise the industry's profile